

# Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks:

## Cumberland Mountain State Park – A Hike That Sparkles

By Fran Wallas

An historic bridge and lots of icicles are highlights of what you might find during a winter hike at Cumberland Mountain State Park in Crossville.

Begin this easy five-mile hike to the right on the Pioneer Short Loop Trail blazed in white (Trail #5 on the map). The fairly level trail hugs Byrd Lake and Byrd Creek. There are a few very large pine trees and an interesting rock outcropping on your left. In about a mile, you will come to a junction. Keep hiking straight on the Pioneer Trail blazed in green (Trail #6 on the map).

In a short distance the trail turns left over a drainage and up a small rise. You get a preview of the sculpted rocks ahead when you get to the first rock house on your right. In about two miles, the trail seems to end at a road. Turn left on the road, cross the bridge and go a short distance. You will see the trail begin again on your left. Take time to enjoy the bridge built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the late 1930s.

You are now on the section of the trail that is an icicle wonderland. The rock houses on both sides of the creek are beautiful any time of the year, but especially in the winter. This is a good time to stop hiking, take pictures, and enjoy the views. The rocks you are

looking at are sandstone of the Rockcastle Conglomerate that formed about 300 million years ago give or take a few years. This layer of rock is resistant to erosion, but has been sculpted by wind and water. In about three miles the trail seems to end at a large boulder. When you get up to the rock, you will find a narrow passage. This small opening is a fun part of the trail and adds to the adventure.

The trail skirts the edge of the golf course but stays in the woods. You will come to a confusing junction. Look down the hill to your left. You will see that the end of the wooden bridge is blazed in green and that is the way to go. If you are daydreaming and go straight, you will find that the trail ends very quickly. Once you have figured this out, the rest is easy.

The trail continues through the woods and rhododendron thickets. You will enjoy the level trail especially if it is snowy and icy. In four miles you come to a clearly marked junction. Go straight and you will be on the other part of the Pioneer Short Loop Trail blazed in white. The trail follows the edge of Byrd Lake except that now you are on the other side. When you see the red roof of the boating dock, you know that you are near the end of the hike. Cross Byrd Lake on the bridge to your left and walk



The Civilian Conservation Corps built this bridge on South Old Mail Road in Cumberland Mountain State Park in Crossville. The trail comes out on one side of the bridge, crosses the bridge, and continues on the other side.

up the steps to the parking lot. You will be glad to see the historic CCC restroom building and boat dock as a perfect place to end your hike.

The narrow passage on the Pioneer Trail at Cumberland Mountain State Park in Crossville.



### Directions

Take I-40 to Exit 317. Follow Highway 127 South for nine miles. The park entrance is on the right. Drive through the park following the signs to the boat dock and park in the boat dock parking lot. Because of renovation work on the dam, a detour may be required. Hikers can get information about the detour from the park office. The trail starts from the parking lot. Trail maps are available at the park office. (It helps you get oriented if you hold the map upside down and look for the "P" and outline of the parking lot.)

#### Cumberland Mountain State Park



(Fran Wallas is an avid hiker. She works as an attorney for the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation in Nashville. You can read about her other Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks at [www.tdec.net/greathikes](http://www.tdec.net/greathikes).)